

H O B B Y

# Bandwagon

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15c



The above photograph was made April 12th at Norfolk, Va., as Dr. C. S. Karland presented Cheerful Gardner and Frank Gentry with Honorary Membership cards to the Circus Historical Society. Presentation was made during performance of Polack Bros. Circus.

— The Circusiana Magazine —

HOBBY

## Bandwagon

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No. 5

HARRY M. SIMPSON  
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## Circus Photos

FROM ORIGINAL NEGATIVES

Many from the Wm. Koford Collection

Partial List Now Ready

## SHANK PHOTOS

Clarence R. Shank  
Member of CHS and CFA  
Camden, Ohio

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## The Publisher Says



The only possible way to secure the most from the organization you belong to is to attend their annual conventions. Here you meet other members, see parts of their collections and have two or three of the most enjoyable days of your life. The Circus Historical Society will meet in Chicago, August 4-5-6 . . . if you are a member, by all means attend . . . if you are not a member, you are welcome to attend and join in three grand days. Make your plans now and be in Chicago from August 5th to 6th.

Every year, those who have attended all of the conventions say, "This is the best convention ever held," so, we can say in advance that this will be the "best."

I still hear complaints that many collectors and fans fail to purchase a ticket to at least one performance while spending a day or days on the lot . . . you owe it to yourself and the circus to PAY as you enter the Big Top. I have failed to find a Circus I couldn't buy a ticket to if an attempt was made . . . try it sometime. The Circus owes us nothing . . . we owe them so very much.

Don't forget . . . be in Chicago on August 4-5-6.

Sincerely,

HARRY M. SOMPSON.



# Hiram Orton, Pioneer Showman

BY J. LOU SAMPSON, Iowa Circus Historian

In writing this story of one of America's Foremost Circus men, I shall try to give the readers of "Bandwagon" what is probably the first authentic history of this noted Showman ever given by a member of the Orton family. I am deeply indebted to Mrs. Miles Orton of Adel, Iowa, for giving me the details of his early life in her own words which follow:

Adel, Iowa

In the year 1853, Hiram Orton was a sailor on the Great Lakes and made his home at Portage, Wisconsin, which was at that time Portage City.

In the fall of 1853 he made his last trip with a load of freight from Milwaukee, down to Chicago, and as the lakes froze over during the winter months there was no shipping until the next Spring.

While in Chicago, Hiram Orton went to see a show which was making its closing stand and performance for the season, and made up his mind that his own children could do everything he saw there.

After the show was out Hiram Orton hunted up the clown whose name was Doc Gilcoson and asked what he was going to do during the winter and was told he was going to repair and paint the wagons for the next season.

He also got hold of the Strong Man whose name was Charles Tubbs, and asked what he was going to do, and was told nothing until Spring. Orton asked both men if they would go home with him to Portage, and they wanted to know if he had a show, whereupon they were informed that he had no show, but that he was going to have one the next Spring.

He told Doc Gilcoson that he wanted him to paint up his wagons, and he told Charles Tubbs that he wanted him to train his children, which he did, and started out in the Spring of 1854.

The show entered the state of Iowa at Dubuque on Monday, July 10, 1854, showing there two days. The show made 39 stands in Iowa, and then went to Illinois.

The season of 1854, the show exhibited in Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and showed at Monroe, Louisiana on Christmas day. In summer the show would go north and south in winter.

The show visited Iowa again on June 11, 1856 and made eleven stands, and again on May 27, 1858 for 15 stands and again on June 11, 1860, making 48 stands. The show was at Des Moines, Ia., on Tuesday, June 26, 1860.

In the year 1858, the show stopped for the winter at Independence, Iowa, and continued to do so until the year of 1864, when they showed in Adel, Iowa, during the summer.

Hiram Orton liked the looks of the country around Adel so well that on his way back in the Fall to quarter at Independence, for the Winter, he stopped overnight at Adel and decided he would make Adel his winter quarters, which he always did after that.

He got a farm three miles east of Adel, which is now called Ortonville, where he always stored his show for the winter.



## HIRAM ORTON (Cont'd)

The children of Hiram Orton were seven in number, Miles, Lester, Dennis and R. Z., Hattie, Irene, and Celeste.

Miles Orton was the greatest bare back rider in those days and was the originator of the Peter Jenkins act (drunk act).

Lester Orton was manager and overseer of the show and getting it over the road, which was a mighty task when you stop to consider the roads they had to travel those days.

Dennis Orton was an acrobat and also did some horseback riding. R. Z., the youngest of the family, was a musician and performer and toe dancer. The daughters were all bareback riders, Irene being the best of the three.

A few years after the coming to Adel, Hiram Orton retired from show business and the sons took over the show and it went by the name of Orton Bros. Circus and was run by that generation until the year 1897, when R. Z. started the same as his father did with his family by training them to be circus performers.

R. Z.'s family also consisted of four boys and three girls. Criley, Lawrence, Miles and Bayard, Grace, Nellie and Sarah, better known as Babe.

MRS. MILES ORTON.

\* \* \*

The following notes were given to the writer by Mrs. Nellie Orton Hoogewoning of Ottumwa, Iowa, a daughter of R. Z. Orton and Mrs. Farrel Murphy of Grinnell, Iowa, a cousin of the Ortons who as a Wire Walker and Bareback Rider traveled with the Orton Bros. Circus in 1915-1916.

Ottumwa, Iowa, Dec. 29, 1949.

Dr. L. J. Sampson,  
Grinnell, Iowa,

Dear Sir:

Your letter received, and I will be glad to help you out with the information you want to the best of my ability.

I believe you are confused with the different branches of the Ortons, so I will start back to Hiram Orton who established his Orton Bros. Circus in 1852 in Wisconsin which was a wagon show and they featured a female band that would parade the town the minute the show arrived. This was a one ring circus and Hiram Orton had four sons, Dennis, Miles, Lester and R. Z. and three daughters, Hattie, Celestia and Irene. Miles and Irene were featured bareback riders and Miles is still known as one of the best riders of all time.

In about 1862 Hiram Orton retired, and Dennis, Miles and Lester took the management of the show until he, Dennis, died with the scarlet fever and Lester retired, so Miles Orton took up the management but was not too successful at first. R. Z. Orton was very young through this time as he was the baby of the family.

Through the Hiram Orton management time, Miles left the Orton show for a season and traveled through the foreign countrys with a circus, and there he met and married Marion Cole who was the Mother of W. W. Cole. They returned to this country and joined the Hiram Orton circus again. When Miles took the management of the Orton Circus, he named it the Miles Orton Circus and it was



## HIRAM ORTON (Cont'd)

a wagon show. Miles and his wife could not get along too well, and finally they parted. Then she and her son, W. W. Cole, organized the Cole Show and Miles went on with his Miles Orton Circus and he built it on to a railroad show of two cars.

Now comes my branch of the Ortons. In 1898, Miles and R. Z. Orton organized Orton Bros. Circus out of Ortonville, Iowa, but the show ran into difficulties in Nebraska in the middle of the season, so the two brothers devided the show property and went their separate ways, and Miles framed another Miles Orton Circus and R. Z. put out the Orton Bros. Circus. R. Z. had seven children, Criley, Lawrence, Miles, Bayard, Grace, Nellie and Sarah. We had our winter quarters at Ortonville, Iowa, where Hiram Orton settled when he first came to Iowa in about 1860.

The R. Z. Orton show started as a wagon show and in 1916 it was a 15 car railroad circus. It was not successful as the weather was against it from the time it opened until it closed July 4th in Minnesota. The next season we went out motorized, and was very successful until 1929 when Criley, the manager of the show passed away suddenly and the times got bad about that time. R. Z. died in 1920. Mrs. Murphy was our second cousin, and she was with the show in 1915-16.

Our family show closed in 1932, and Miles retired on a two acre tract in Ortonville we had purchased in 1916 for a side track for the railroad circus. Bayard and I also retired in 1934 and Lawrence, Grace and Sarah are still on the road. I married Wm. Hoogewoning, an old circus man that had been in and out of show business all his life. Now in 1916 on the railroad show, Dave Garrett had the advance and Doc Lano had the sideshow. We had two elephants, Hero of the Honest Bill show and Juno. Hero went crazy in Elkton S. Dakota, and had to be killed. He was the feature as he was a big one. Miles the 2nd was featured also as he too was a very good bareback rider. I was featured to as a bareback rider.

In looking back over the history, I find that Uncle Miles had a railroad circus at the time he and Aunt Marian parted, and he and W. W. Cole divided the show and Aunt Marion went with her son. The tunnel incident happened on the Uncle Miles show.

There was a partnership formed of Orton and Older in 1854-55-56, but they did not get along too well. Older sold out to Orton. I have a contract that was made between Orton and Older and an Inn in Fairfield, Iowa, in 1856 where the Inn was to put up several of the show troupe and would not be responsible for any damages down in the bar room. They were also to feed the stock for 25c per day to all the stock could eat.

My brother Miles managed our show after Criley's death. We were noted for having more wild animals than any other motorized circus and we gave the entire performance in the family. Also the band. There were 27 Ortons on the show besides the in-laws. We did not carry a sideshow, but we did have four animal pits on the front. R. Z. Orton advanced the show, and after his death Criley took up those duties besides the management of the show. Miles built the tents in winterquarters. Bayard handled the band and the wild animals and Lawrence on the transportation and Supt. of lot.



### HIRAM ORTON (Cont'd)

I had concessions and Grace the wardrobe and the cookhouse and Mother was in the office. Sarah devoted her entire time in horse, pony and dog training.

So you see there were the two different Orton Bros. Circuses, the Hiram and the R. Z. Orton. So many show people get confused about this. After Hiram Orton retired from poor health, he staid with my father on the farm at Ortonville. The old ring where the ringbarn stood is still there and several animal graves of the Hiram Orton show on the Orton farm at Ortonville. Uncle Miles Orton died in about 1906.

Father told me that his father was so proud of his sons Dennis and Miles and they would not allow anyone to talk sassy to their father. Dad said that Grandfather used to start fusses on purpose to see Dennis defend him as he could kick and fist fight at the same time and could lick several at one time. The strong man on the show got a grudge at Grandfather, and one day he tried to kill him by throwing a dumb bell down the hotel stairs just as he started up. Uncle Dennis just about killed the strong man.

When father was 12 years old the show was playing Texas, and the country was full of horse theives. Father was dressed as a girl in the female band, and when the theives rode in to the ring, the band leader told the band to run for their lives. They all went under the sidewall and father forgot his cornet, so he thought he would go back for it as the theives would surely not shoot a girl. He was wrong, and just as he turned with his cornet to rush back out, the man shot father in the back. He was an invalid for a long time. I have a picture of the female band in the band wagon in 1862. Hi Marces was the band leader on the old Orton show and he married Irene Orton. Charlie Shafer was the boss canvasman and a Mr. Wilkonson was the featured clown, and they really featured their clowns in those days as they had a featured spot and they featured singing. Uncle Miles was known for taking children wherever he could run on to them, and learning them the business. A few of them were Gorden and Claude, also Ivy Orton and Dan Leon. My brother Miles was named for Uncle Miles. The Hiram Orton show featured the Garland Entry, six ladies and six gents with their high hats and tails and the ladies on their side saddles with the flowing skirts and picture hats with plumes, and another feature was the Pete Jinks comic riding act featuring Uncle Miles. My brother Miles did the same act and we featured it and it went over big.

I believe I have covered about all I can think of at this time and I hope it will help you with your writeup.

I will be glad to help you out for any other information along this line that you may need if I can. Thanks for the Bandwagon magazine. It is the first one I have seen in a long time.

Yours truly,

NELLIE HOOGEWONING.

P. S. My father, R. Z., traveled and had the concessions on the Cole show after it was organized for several years. He retired when he married mother, and then formed the partnership with Uncle Miles in 1898. Myron Orton on the Ringling Show is a son of Uncle Miles. His two sons never tried to run a circus, but devoted their



## HIRAM ORTON (Cont'd)

time to a wire act. They were on the Ringling a few seasons with the high act and the little Jay man they had in the act was killed on the Ringling show. Then they played theatres entirely over the Orpheum circuit mostly. Norman died three years ago.

\* \* \*

The following was furnished by Mr. Charlie Campbell of Sylva, N. C.:

Here is a little instance which happened 2½ miles out of Sylva, season of about 1907. The Miles Orton Circus Train was enroute from Bryson City to Sylva, and the tunnel 2½ miles from here was not checked for an extra long flat-car which was in the train. Sylva and other spots were cancelled, because the train could not get through the tunnel and the train and Circus was rerouted, and down by Atlanta, Ga., and came in here two weeks later.

\* \* \*

The Orton name has been prominent in Circus history since 1852, when Hiram Orton organized his first show in Portage, Wisc. In 1950 we still find "The Sensational Orttons" Double High Swaying Pole Act working for the Al Martin Agency of Boston, Mass., featuring Grace Orton, the only girl to ever accomplish a Ane Hand Stand atop a 100 foot high pole.

Lester Orton, living at Ortonville, Iowa, also does a High Swaying Pole Act at Fairs and Celebrations, thus we find that the Orton name is traditional with circuses for nearly a century, and will continue on as long as the Circus exists as an amusement institution.

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Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Wixom are attending the P. T. Barnum Festival at Bridgeport, Conn., from June 9th to 12th. Clyde relates that Bridgeport would be a grand spot for the National CHS convention.

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Mr. and Mrs. John Patrick are announcing the marriage of their daughter Martha Ethel, to Donald F. Smith on Saturday, June 24th. The wedding ceremonies took place at the St. Theresa Church in Detroit. Don Smith is a well known collector of circusiana, circus photographer, model builder and is the founder of the Circus Historical Society. The Bandwagon and their many friends join in wishing both the bride and groom "Congratulations."

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Russell Cook, 620 Elm St., Union, N. Y., would like to know the name, day and date of any railroad circuses that played Hancock, N. Y. in 1911. Although Cook was a little tot then this circus had Indians and might have been the 101 Ranch. Can anyone help him?

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Walter L. Main caught James M. Cole Circus and King Bros. Circus in May and delivered a talk to the United Showman's Assn. at Canton, Ohio, on May 7th.

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Bud E. Anderson, owner of Seal Bros.' Circus, died June 15 of injuries sustained in a truck accident. Services June 19 at Emporia, Kansas.



# The Bandwagon

News and Activities of the  
**CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
Founded in 1939

HARRY M. SIMPSON-----EDITOR

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Div. 10—South America and England—E.  
Titus.

C. Spencer Chambers, leading dealer in circusiana and theatre material, Syracuse, N. Y., plans to retire as Principal of Lincoln High on June 30th. Mr. Chambers has taught in Syracuse schools for past nine years. Mr. Chambers will move his business to Cleveland, Ohio.

## MINSTREL SHOW PHOTOS

SEND FOR LIST

**A. H. GILGER**

576 S. Roys Ave., Columbus, Ohio

## A VISIT TO AL G. KELLY & MILLER BROS. CIRCUS

To members of CHS who want to see a real up-to-date well equipped motorized Circus I recommend they visit the Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus when it plays near them this season.

It was my pleasure to catch this Circus at Higgisville, Mo., May 18th. Mrs. Beggs and the writer drove down for the day and were royally welcomed by the management, the senior Mr. Miller and two sons, and with a personally conducted tour by my good friend W. H. (Bill) Woodcock, who has charge of the herd of elephants.

This show lives up to its billing in size, animals and performance. They carry three big tops, menagerie side show, horse and elephant and big show top, besides smaller cook house, dressing tops, etc. The menagerie is surprising in size and selection of animals. A full line of cat animals including lions, black and polar bears, leopards, tigers and other smaller animals, several camels, zebras and other hay animals not not to neglect listing Giraffe, Rhinoceros and Hippopotamus, scarce items on any circus.

The big top has five rings and two stages and a very rounded and pleasing performance of Circus acts, trained dogs, bareback riding, trained ponies and a fine string of high school horses and trained elephants that keeps the audience in their seats to the end.

This Circus carries fourteen trained elephants all under the direction of W. H. Woodcock. They make five appearances in all rings, during the performance and the way they are put through their routines lends zim and strength to the performance. I understand several of these ele-

(Continued on page 9)



# Reminiscences Of Jake Posey

1874, father was boss hostler with John Robinson Circus. I was eleven years of age, when school was out for the summer, I went on to the show to spend my vacation. The show had a twenty pony team, the driver was Louis Willis, a colored boy, with the show, he went by the name of "Nigger Lou," he also did a riding act in the show. The show also had a ten pony team, which pulled a small golden chariot in parade, Crissie Stickney, Robert Stickney's sister, rode in the chariot dressed as Columbia. Father told me to take the team for parade. When the parade arrived on the lot from parade, John Robinson saw me and told father to keep me on the team, as I looked much better than a man driving small ponies. John Robinson had me measured for a livery suit, with top hat. When I received the suit, I was so proud I swelled up and bust the buttons off. I was the envy of all the kids in every town. I drove the team until school started, when I went home, with my livery suit.

1880, I drove a six horse team with the Van Amburgh Golden Circus and Menagerie. The team pulled a tableau. There are probably a lot of people who do not know what a tableau is, for their benefit I will say a tableau is a covered box wagon, decorated with mirrors, heavy carvings, finished in gold leaf and bright attractive colors. This tableau carried the performers hotel trunks. The performers, musicians, and ticket sellers stopped at hotels and their trunks were taken to the hotel each Sunday and Wednesday, in order to give them a change of street clothes. The show had no menagerie tent, the animals were kept in the big top. The show had one elephant, he was very large, with long tusks, he was a one man elephant, and that man was "Hank" Johnson. When the big top was torn down, "Hank" would take the elephant, whose name was "Bolivar" out and chain him to a tree or anything stout enough to hold him. One night he happened to be chained to a tree close to my tableau, in the morning when I went out to hitch up, I noticed Bolivar rather close to the wagon. I took a bunch of hay, held it

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## KELLY-MILLER CIRCUS (Cont'd)

phants are new this season, Woodcock having broken them in and trained during past winter at quarters.

The entire Circus is loaded and transported on large modern tractors and semi-trailers, for example three are required to carry the fourteen elephants. There is no old, small or gilly equipment on the show and canvass is new or nearly so. The show loads at night and moves to next stand early A. M.

I understand the Millers came up in the show business the hard way. That is from a small show to the present large and complete circus. The senior Miller and two sons are a team and know the show business. Naturally with my background of show and circus wagons I was interested in the good and modern equipment on the show and it is my pleasure to recommend this Circus as a good clean traveling organization.

Sincerely,

J. W. BEGGS, CHS 355.



## REMINISCES OF JAKE POSEY (Cont'd)

out for Bolivar, he "Bolivar" stuck out his trunk and at the same time had his foreleg, to which the chain was attached, stretched back to make me think he could not reach the hay, but, he had enough slack in the chain, when I lead my wheel horse around to the pole, "Bolivar" made a lunge and knocked me and the horse over the pole. "Denny" the night watchman rode over the road with me, I did not go in the train with the other wagons, because "Denny" went to the hotel to call the people, and see that they were on their way, before we started. One morning I came upon "Hank" and "Bolivar," they had come to a small bridge, and "Bolivar" would not cross the bridge. Elephants are very smart when they come to bridges, they seem to know if the bridge is strong enough to carry them, if not, you can't make them cross it, and this morning "Bolivar" refused to cross this bridge, and, in going down around the bridge and across the stream, which was a small stream, "Bolivar" became mired in the mud and could not move. "Hank" was crying and wanted to know what to do. I told him as far as I was concerned, he, "Bolivar" could stay there. I awakened "Denny" and we held a consultation.

There was a farm house a short distance down the road, the farmer had a large pile of old fence rails which he used for stove wood. Denny bargained with him for the use of some of them, and his wagon to haul them. I took a pair of my horses, hitched them to his farm wagon, I loaded the rails, hauled them where "Bolivar" was. "Hank" would pull "Bolivar" over to one side, Denny and I would push the fence rails in the mud at the side of "Bolivar's" legs, then Hank would pull "Bolivar" over to the opposite side, we would push in more rails, we kept this up until "Bolivar" was high enough to walk out on the pile of rails laid down. When "Bolivar" was out on hard ground, Hank called me. He said, "Now Jake, you can make friends with Bolivar." I went up to "Bolivar," rubbed his trunk, he closed his eyes, made a low squeaky noise and Hank was right, he, "Bolivar" never tried to get me after that.

The show had a large rhinoceros, an eight horse team hauled it over the road. In those days it was mud hub deep the entire route, it was indeed a treat when we were fortunate enough to have a turnpike to the next town, the turnpike had toll gates every few miles. The gate keeper would pull the gate across the road, lock it, and go to bed. The man who paid the toll would go ahead, wake the gate keeper, then remain at the gate and check all the wagons through. The driver of the team that hauled the rhinoceros, would be away from the show for a week at a time on account of a bad bridge, ferry, or a stream which they must ford. The bridges in those days were the old covered wooden bridge, very narrow and low. The driver carried a set of rollers, if the bridge was too low, he would take off the wheels, and put on the rollers.

I was with the Sells Brothers railroad Circus the seasons of 1881-82 and 83. It opened each season in Columbus, Ohio. There were four brothers—Eph, Lew, Pete and Adam. Prior to their entrance into show business, they traveled through the country with a horse and wagon, selling tinware. When they went in show business, Eph was manager with Adam assisting. Pete was general agent; Bud Gorman, Equestrian director; Charley Bolus, boss canvasman; Jack



## REMINISCES OF JAKE POSEY (Cont'd)

Schumate, boss hostler; Archie Seals, train master; Patsy (Forepaugh) Meagher, supt. of the menagerie, which consisted of fifty cages. Aside from the "hippo." "Rhino" dens, the balance were all small cages, which loaded crosswise on the flats. That is where the train men got the name of razor-back, they would put their back to the wheel, take hold of a spoke in the wheel, and the boss would say, "Raise your Backs" and they would throw the cage around crosswise. The winter quarters was one mile from Columbus, was called "Sellsville." The show carried 65 standard length railroad cars, 120 wagons, including the fifty cages, 200 baggage horses, 75 ring horses. I think Willie Sells was a foster son of Adam, who, also had a son of his own about the age of Willie. By the name of Allen, who held no title, but was an all-around man who could take any part, except the performance. He was an exceptionally good eight horse driver. The show gave a good performance, one of the best, at that time. Strong line of leapers, Sam Rhinehart was principal leaper, doing doubles over a string of elephants. Their route was east of the Rockies, always closed in the deep south and had a long run home.

In 1881, I drove six ponies, all stallions, and they run away with me whenever they felt like it, and they felt like it most every day.

In 1882, I drove six horses which pulled a tableau in parade on which was mounted a small elephant. One day while parading down a street which had trees with branches extending out over the street, the boy in charge of the elephant, was busy flirting with the girls. The elephant would pull the leaves and eat them, she (the elephant) threw her trunk over a limb and did not let go, when the tableau was pulled from under her, the limb broke and the elephant fell in the street. It did not take the spectators long to get in the clear. I did not stop, I let the boy and elephant hoof it back to the lot. When the boy was paid off and went back on the farm.

1883, I was given an eight horse team. They were called the eight white mice, white as snow, pink skin and eyes, like an albino. This team pulled in parade, a tableau which was advertised as the tableau of beauty, the most beautiful women in the world. One girl in the center of the wagon, was mounted high on a globe, she was dressed as Columbia, and a girl on each corner. We closed in Texas, do not remember the name of the town. I remember we had a long run home. I went home, in Cincinnati, drove a team that winter for U. S. Express Co.

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On May 10th, Jack Walsh of Hunt Bros. Circus lifted two men and an elephant while the circus was showing at Trenton, N. J. Gross weight was 3000 pounds.



Chris Viohl, Jr.  
2203 W. 18th St.,  
Wilmington, Dela.  
BC 1

# CIRCUSIANA

BOUGHT and SOLD



## C. Spencer Chambers

P. O. Box 722

SYRACUSE 1, N. Y., U. S. A.